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Evans, GOD AND MORAL OBLIGATION

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instead by annihilating them. A third essay, by Nicholas Wolterstorff, contains an illuminating exploration of the relation of generosity to justice, framed by a discussion of Jesus's parable of the laborers in the vineyard. In that parable, laborers employed for only a short time are generously paid the same as the laborers who worked the full day. Wolterstorff argues that this arrangement was not unjust—the full-day laborers were not wronged by not receiving additional pay—and that the Aristotelian formula for justice in distributions that might yield the conclusion that it *was* unjust is mistaken. Wolterstorff does not pursue the matter, but readers might ponder how his conclusions fit with their own views on the distribution of divine salvific grace.

The final section of the book, titled “God and Moral Responsibility,” contains an unusual pair of essays that address what some lesser-known philosophers have said on that topic, fairly loosely construed. The first, by Vasil Gluchman, contains reflections on the work of two eighteenth-century Lutheran theologians, Pavel Jakobei and Augustin Dolezal, who held different views on sin and evil. Gluchman mostly surveys their ideas and does not include an analysis of which thinker may have been closer to the truth. In the second essay, Alicja A. Gescinska explains the later work of German philosopher Max Scheler and tries to show its connection to his earlier work. One of Scheler's controversial claims in this later work is that we create God rather than the other way around, an apparent departure from his earlier views that (unsurprisingly) did not impress his Catholic contemporaries. While this essay will be of interest to those familiar with Scheler and his style of thinking, Gescinska does more to explain where the thinking came from than to render it compelling.

In short, while the final section of the book does not really fit with what has come before it, the book as a whole contains a valuable collection of essays on an interesting set of topics.

God and Moral Obligation, by C. Stephen Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 199 pages. \$99.00 cloth.

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Fifteen years have passed since the publication of Robert M. Adams's *Finite and Infinite Goods*, in which Adams argued for a thoroughgoingly theistic account of moral properties.¹ One piece of Adams's account was a divine command theory of moral obligation, on which *being morally obligatory* is

¹Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

identified with *being divinely commanded*. In the meantime there have been a number of alternative theistic accounts of deontic properties offered, and Adams's views have been subjected to a number of lines of criticism. So it is very welcome that an excellent philosopher like C. Stephen Evans has taken up Adams's account of moral obligation, arguing for its indispensability within a theistic ethical framework and for its superiority to rival nontheistic accounts.

The structure of Evans's book is as follows. He first offers a formal account of moral obligation (chapter 1). He then argues that a certain sort of divine command theory (DCT), on which *being morally obligatory* is identified with *being divinely commanded*, provides a plausible account of that explanandum (chapter 2). He attempts to co-opt rather than attack allegedly rival natural law and virtue accounts of moral obligation, arguing that there need be no inconsistency between DCT and natural law theory (NLT) on one hand and between DCT and virtue ethics on the other; indeed, DCT can draw upon resources provided by these views in making its position more attractive (chapter 3). He considers and rejects some common objections to DCT, some formidable, some knuckleheaded (chapter 4), and then considers the respective merits of DCT in comparison with not-essentially-theistic theories of moral obligation (chapter 5). He concludes by considering why we ought not to be skeptics about moral obligation, and argues that the reality of moral obligation and the superiority of DCT as an account of moral obligation provides part of a cumulative case argument for God's existence (chapter 6). I describe some parts of this argument in more detail below. There is a massive amount that is of interest and worthy of discussion, so my treatment will be selective, focusing on Evans's accounts of the best formulation of DCT, the relationship of NLT to DCT, and the role of accountability in the defense of DCT.

There are, on Evans's view, objective facts about moral obligation (29). Evans takes the fact that some action is morally obligatory to be an all-or-nothing affair (12–13) that characteristically closes deliberation about whether to perform that action (13). In contrast to other sorts of obligations, they "hold for persons as persons" (14), giving persons generally compelling reasons to comply (29) that are characteristically motivating (30). So far, this analysis of moral obligation is consistent with a view like Joseph Raz's, on which to be obligatory is simply to give a certain sort of reason for action.² Evans takes it, though, following Adams on one hand³ and Stephen Darwall⁴ on another, that obligation involves the further notion of *accountability*: to fail with respect to an obligation is to render oneself accountable to some other party (14).

²See, for example, Raz, *The Authority of Law* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 235.

³Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 233.

⁴Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 93.

Evans judges that DCT is at least a plausible candidate for an account of moral obligation, where an account of moral obligation tells us why it is that an act that is morally obligatory exhibits all of these features. That God commands something is an objective matter of fact (30), and it is clear that the fact that God commands something will be reason-giving and typically motivating, so long as we take the establishing of a proper relationship with God to be an essential part of our final good (31). Evans notes, rightly, that such a view of moral obligation does not entail that God has any discretion at all about what God commands; it is compatible with DCT that what God commands is a matter of necessity. What is essential to DCT, rather, is that the status of norms as morally obligatory depends on the presence of a divine command; as the issue of dependence is distinct from the issue of modality, it is just a mistake to conflate them (32–37). Evans also judges that a defender of DCT can have a very expansive view on the sources of knowledge available concerning what is morally obligatory (37–45). Evans thinks that, understood in this way, moral obligations are very plausibly explained by a version of DCT.

What is the best way to formulate DCT? By the time Adams wrote *Finite and Infinite Goods*, an intramural dispute had arisen among theological voluntarists about whether the best voluntarist account would be framed in terms of divine commands or divine willings. Does a moral obligation to perform some action depend on God's having performed a certain illocutionary act, *commanding* the performance of that action? Or does it instead depend on what God *wills*—that God *aims at*, or *intends*, or *wants* the performance of that action? Each of these views has some initial appeal and some strong reasons in its favor. Adams firmly endorses divine command, strictly construed.⁵ Evans departs both from Adams and from defenders of the divine will view. He agrees with the divine will defenders against Adams that what matters is what God wills; he agrees with Adams against divine will defenders that it is absurd to hold that we should be bound to adhere to God's will were it unknowable to us. Evans thus takes a middle route, holding that what is relevant for moral obligation is God's *expressed* will, whether that will is expressed via commands or some other sort of speech act (25). I am unconvinced by this move of Evans's, for if what matters is that God's will be knowable, that consideration does not provide adequate justification for requiring that the divine will be communicated or expressed by God in any way. For there may be ways of knowing God's will other than through God's expressing it in some way. (Indeed, given Evans's emphasis on the wide-ranging possibilities for coming to know our moral obligations on DCT, it seems clear that he is committed to this.) If, for example, we know that God is perfectly loving, we may be able to know some particular things that God wills for us even without God's expressing that will to us, and I am not sure why we would not take ourselves to be bound by that will. On the other hand, if simply being able to

⁵Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 258–262.

infer what God wills us to do is sufficient to count as God's *communicating* God's will, I do not think that Evans's view is any different from the divine will views from which he purports to distinguish his own view.

Evans considers three types of challenges to his DCT view: challenges from natural law theory and virtue theory (especially in their theistic formulations), challenges to DCT on its own terms, and challenges from non-theistic theories. He is ecumenical with respect to natural law views like John Finnis's and my own and virtue theories like Linda Zagzebski's: he thinks that there is some truth to these rival views, and that they should not be seen as opposing DCT but as offering "complementary answers to different questions" (53). This is a generous emphasis by Evans, because it is pretty clear that many defenders of these views have wanted to give some account of moral obligation, and that by Evans's lights their views must be judged failures. So perhaps it is better to think of Evans as salvaging the partial truth in these views, making some use of them: even if, for example, natural law theory cannot provide an account of moral obligation in terms of the goods of practical rationality, it nevertheless can be put to work in giving an account of the background theory of the good that DCT requires (62–68).

I am not sure that, by his own lights, Evans can make the use of natural law theory that he wants to make of it. In order to make the use of it that he wants to make, natural law theory would have to be (a) basically sound as an account of goods and reasons but (b) inadequate as a theory of moral obligation. I am unsure whether Evans has successfully showed DCT superior to natural law theory as an account of moral obligation (68–74), but I want to focus on the (a) condition rather than the (b) condition. Evans's criticisms of natural law theory extend past its adequacy as a theory of moral obligation and all the way to its theory of the sort of reasons for action that human goods give (68–74): natural law views cannot provide an acceptable account of the ways in which human goods provide not only agent-relative but agent-neutral reasons for action. (Though his insightful criticisms are explicitly aimed at my own particular natural law view, he thinks these criticisms generalize (73).) If Evans's criticisms are successful, it seems to me that he undermines natural law theory not only as a theory of moral obligation but also as the background normative theory that Evans takes DCT to require (62–68).

The final set of questions I want to raise concerns Evans's argument for DCT. These questions concern the role of *accountability* in Evans's argument for DCT. Evans's initial defense of DCT does not appeal to this accountability relationship, but instead to the reason-giving and motivating power of moral obligation (30–32). What we see, if these arguments succeed, is that we have very good reason to do what God commands us to do; indeed, being given a divine command to do something should exclude from deliberation alternatives incompatible with the divine command. But this cannot be what makes the case for DCT. For Evans points out that *accountability* is essential to obligation. We might reasonably wonder, then,

whether the fact that God's expressed will is reason-giving and motivating must bring along with it an accountability to God for failures to appropriately respond to God's will; and we might reasonably think—Evans gives no reason not to believe this—that there are some actions that even apart from God's expressed will are actions that we have decisive reason and characteristic motivation not to perform. So Evans must be relying on the accountability feature to do a lot of the work of showing that DCT is both in itself a plausible account of moral obligation and a feature accounting for which makes DCT superior to its rivals.

But it is not clear that we have been given an account of how this accountability is present, that is, how God has the requisite *standing* to enforce compliance. This is not to say that such an account could not be forthcoming. But I would like to see the precise shape that it will take, because the shape that it takes will help to determine the extent to which DCT turns out to be an initially plausible account of moral obligation and superior to its theistic but nonvoluntarist and nontheistic rivals.

The notion of accountability here is a normative notion. So the claim is not, I take it, that one who violates an obligation of some type will be successfully made sorry for doing so. The fact that I am powerful and everyone is too afraid, and reasonably so, to hold me to account for the violation of some norm that I am under does nothing to call into question the status of that norm as an obligation. So Evans's argument cannot be that one is under a moral obligation only if one will be in fact successfully be held to account for violating it. It is, rather, that it is characteristic that there are parties who have standing, who are *entitled*, to somehow hold one to compliance. And that's what I do not find in Evans's account. So let me press two challenges regarding the role of accountability.

First, a challenge framed comparatively: Evans's view requires for success that the only or best candidate party to have the standing to hold agents to account for moral wrongdoing is God. But why might not the parties to whom one is accountable often be fellow created rational beings? They are—and I trust that no DCT defender wants to deny this—often entitled to demand that one comply with various norms. This view is obviously available to secular moralists such as Darwall, who appeals to the moral community as the party with standing to insist on compliance. But a theistic, but nonvoluntarist, ethicist might go further. The *imago Dei* notion, so useful to Evans in helping to support the idea of humans' bearing intrinsic worth (143–144), can be used to make trouble for his DCT. A theistic nonvoluntarist might claim that part of my dignity as a human is not only that I can hope that my fellow humans will act rightly with respect to me, but also that I am entitled to demand that they do so. And if I and my fellow humans have this entitlement, then why must we appeal to God as the *sole* party whose standing captures the accountability feature of moral obligation?

Second, a challenge framed noncomparatively. On the face of things, it seems to me that there is a disconnect between the main idea of a DCT—that

the norms of moral obligation exist in virtue of God's commands—and this accountability defense of it. If the really distinctive feature of the obligatory is the accountability relationship, why must God be cast as the *commander* of moral norms, rather than as simply their *enforcer*, or *guarantor*?

This is a very good book with which to think through systematically the case for a divine command account of moral obligation. It gathers in the most powerful arguments for the divine command account, develops them further, and generously and fairly deploys them against a range of argumentative opponents. As Evans predicts (vi), I was not moved from my antivoluntarism by these arguments. But it did become clearer to me where there was room for divine command theorists to develop their view in a way that would place real pressure on nonvoluntarist accounts.⁶

⁶Thanks to Terence Cuneo for helpful comments on a draft of this review.

Honor For Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defense, by William Lad Sessions. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. 224 pages. \$110.00 cloth.

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In the preface to William Lad Sessions's monograph *Honor For Us*, he explains that he is not joining a philosophical conversation, but rather trying to start one. Contemporary philosophers haven't had much to say about honor, except in passing. (Perhaps the most notable exception is Anthony Appiah's *The Honor Code*, which appeared shortly after Sessions's book.) Sessions's main thesis is that the concept of personal honor, though much maligned—and admittedly dangerous—might just have something important to offer us, both in helping us to understand our social reality, and in providing us with an inspiring ideal. Sessions's book is engagingly written, philosophically interesting, and provocative—and in these ways, it does serve as an excellent conversation starter. In other ways, however, it could have been more effective at drawing readers into the conversation and convincing them that personal honor might be valuable "for us."

Like most contemporary philosophers, I hadn't thought much about the concept of honor before reading Sessions's book. Indeed, I initially felt a bit disoriented and was well into the book before I felt I had a grip on what, exactly, Sessions was interested in initiating a discussion about. Insofar as I am accustomed to thinking in terms of honor, I usually have